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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the myths surrounding the higher education of commuter students and investigates their needs and concerns. Today's college students include increasing numbers of adult, female, minority, and part-time students. Commuter students, i.e., those living off-campus, make up the largest and most diverse group. Many of these students attend college to improve their employment potential. Their common concerns relate to transportation, safety, work, managing households, caring for family members, the side effects of medication, and establishing college roots. Their support systems consist of family and friends, some of whom may feel threatened by, and unsupportive of, the student's commitment to attend college. College personnel entertain several myths about these students regarding their commitment to academic achievement, their abilities and aspirations, and the costs required to educate them. Psychological and other theories may illuminate these students' difficulties. Measures which institutions should adopt to help commuter students include committing to the equality of all students and ensuring that college programs address these needs equitably. Measures that the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign provide for commuter students include off-campus courses and programs. Measures that Chicago State University has initiated include a streamlined, shortened registration process and a "welcome week." Other methods to help community students with the college experience include providing weekend and evening courses, and child care services, and keeping the library open until 2 a.m. during final exams. Hopefully, increased awareness of college administrators of the special needs of commuter students will lead to improved services for them. (Contains 20 references.) (CK)

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Commuter Students in Colleges and Universities

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1995

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Running Head: Commuters

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Today's college and university students predominantly commute to classes. The young, white, residential male is no longer the majority student in higher education. Characteristics of commuter students will be examined. Issues related to the large numbers of commuter students on today's campuses will be discussed. Myths surrounding education of commuter students will be explored followed by an investigation of the common needs and concerns of this student population. The final portion of this paper will explore some measures which have been attempted while trying to better solve the hurdles faced by commuter students.

Who Are Today's Students?

Today's students do not look like the students of yesterday. Instead of the traditional, young, Caucasian male filling the college and university campuses we see increased numbers of adult, female, minority, and part-time students. Likins (1986) says that students who live on college campuses comprise only 20% of today's total student population. Eighty percent of today's college students commute (Jacoby, 1989). Furthermore, demographics indicate that the incidence of commuter students will only increase rather than decrease. Rhatigan (1986) states that beginning in 1988, the projected population of high school graduates will continue to decline for nearly a decade. According to Jacoby (1989) the numbers of high school graduates will decrease by 25% by 1994. In 1970, 81% of the college freshmen were 18 years old or younger (Dey, Astin, Korn, 1991); while in 1994 only 73% of college freshmen were within this age group (Astin, Korn, Sax, Mahoney, 1994).

Who Are The Commuter Students?

Commuter students have been defined as all those students who do not live in institution owned housing (Jacoby, 1989). Rhatigan (1986) also includes any students

who live in fraternities, sororities, or in off-campus housing in any area immediately surrounding the campus.

Commuting students make up the largest, most complex and diverse group of students to ever attend higher education (Banning & Hughes, 1986). These students are usually older than traditional age students, have very defined goals, and attend school part-time. Students from minorities, especially Hispanics and African Americans, are attending colleges in greater numbers than in prior years.

Many of today's students attend college to better their employment possibilities. These students may be attending as a result of the urgings of their employers or they may be attending merely as a result of their own decisions. They may be attending college to complete specific courses, achieve a degree, or to gain a specific, job related certificate. Students may or may not have time off from the jobs to attend classes. Some employers are much more agreeable than others in assisting employees gain skills related to job advancement. Students who feel threatened, if they expose their job and college goals, will be reluctant to even reveal that they are attending college.

The majority of college students today are women. In 1970, females made up 45.2% of the American freshmen college students. Contrast this with the figures of 1994 in which females comprised 53.58% of the American college freshmen (Astin, Korn, Sax, & Mahoney, 1994; Dey, Astin, & Korn, 1991). These students are often older than the traditional college aged student and have multiple life roles. They are often either married or single parents. They are usually employed and want to better their stations or outlooks for future employment. Often, other responsibilities take priority over the responsibility of school related activities.

Today more students attend colleges and universities from low income families than in prior years (Rhatigan, 1986). Often these students are female with the concerns that have already been discussed. Others from low income families might include large numbers of minority students. Somewhat associated with low income backgrounds is the characteristic of high risk students. More high risk students are admitted to higher education greatly, in part, due to the open door policies of the community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1989). These high risk students are frequently from Hispanic families and are the first generation higher education students from their families. They have many problems to overcome. They have no mentors from their families to help them in this foreign, new, lifestyle. Families may or may not offer encouragement or support depending upon their state of agreement with the family member attending college. Other minority groups that are at high risk include students from North American Indian Families. They are often placed in serious financial crunches because they feel bound to continue to support and assist their families at home while they are attending school. They act on their values by sharing scholarship monies with their families using all of their funds prior to completing their education (Oppelt, 1989).

High risk students are very needy. Colleges and universities must provide programs to help them attain an acceptable level of basic knowledge and skills prior to attacking the regular classes. However, remediation is often not enough for many of these students. Studies have shown that student success has been closely linked to the extent that students relate to peers and to the faculty (Astin, 1993). Commuter students usually attend classes and then leave the college or university to return home to their other responsibilities. They do not have time to develop relationships with

others outside of the classroom. Those relationships that they do develop in the classroom are limited by the amount of time available to socialize with others during a class period. High risk students do not have this vital crutch of peer support to help them better understand and cope with their educational experiences.

Commuter students, although vastly different, do share some common concerns. Their common concerns relate to the experiences of attending campuses while living away. Commuter students are concerned with traffic, road conditions, parking, their automobiles, transportation schedules, and safety issues related to arriving home after dark. In contrast to the residential students whose "living room" is the Student Union, commuter students' living rooms are their cars and "knapsacks" or bookbags as we call them today (Banning & Hughes, 1986).

Besides issues of mobility, transportation, and multiple life roles, commuter students also have different support systems (Wilmes & Quade, 1986). Unlike the residential students, commuter students do not have the time to develop peer and faculty-student relationships. These significant others, who understand what other students are undertaking and facing, are not available to support the commuter students. Commuter students' support systems consist of the family members and friends back home; persons who are not related in a direct way to the institution. This decreases the extent of understanding which commuter students may feel from their supports. Support systems may or may not be helpful to the students depending upon how much they are in agreement with the students' choices to attend college. Family members may be totally agreeable to the college experience or threatened that the student will change in ways that are not compatible with prior relationships. Commuting students who are younger may receive their main support from old friends,

these relationships will change and become threatened when one attends college while the others do not.

Why Is This An Issue?

College personnel do not understand the needs of commuter students. They have not incorporated the commuter students' needs into policies, programs, and practices (Jacoby, 1989). Commuter students are usually compared and contrasted to residential students. They are treated as a homogeneous group (Jacoby, 1989; Rhatigan, 1986) both in research and in practice. Their many diversities are not recognized or considered when adapting the college experience to meet their needs. Many of the frustrations and problems facing university personnel who are instituting programs for the commuter students are related to the lack of recognizing the diversity and uniqueness of this significant group of learners. Likins (1986) blames the continuance of high attrition, low attendance in programs, and low service utilization upon the persistent comparison of commuter students to residential ones.

One would think that the above phenomenon would only be present at the traditionally residential campuses. This is not the situation; however, as the colleges that are either predominantly or totally commuter also treat their students as if they are residential students. This is probably because the administrators, staff, and faculty are highly steeped in the traditional, residential ways of college functioning. However, one would not think this to be the case of the community colleges. Although there were significant university personnel inputs into the development of community colleges, the traditional operation of the community colleges was to be an extension of the secondary, high school systems (Cohen & Brawer, 1989).

Research on commuter students is limited and inadequate. It traditionally

compares them to residential students. Early research was based on very little data with very few sources cited. This inadequate research was then cited in later studies, perpetuating an already inadequate process (Jacoby, 1989). Wilmes & Quade (1986) state that universities usually instituted programs for commuters in a "conceptual vacuum;" there was no theoretical basis for understanding these students. Investigators have traditionally viewed the residential experience as the norm and have compared commuters to this imposed norm (Jacoby, 1989). It was the overall opinion of college personnel that all programs and services for the residential students equally served the commuting students. The many diversities of commuters were overlooked and they were treated as one, homogeneous group in studies. The diverse, complexities have only recently been considered in studies investigating the commuter students (Jacoby, 1989; Likins, 1986).

Jacoby (1989) states that while college and university administrators have accepted commuter students today, faculty have accepted them to a lesser degree and facilities have been modified only slightly to accommodate their special needs. The major difference in the minds of faculty between residential and commuter students is where they sleep and how they get to class. Consideration for students' time, accessibility to libraries and other services, and the opportunities for developing strong peer and faculty-students relationships is often overlooked.

Another problem facing commuter students includes the lack of opportunity to develop strong, constituency groups. Because they are unable to develop such groups, they do not have a strong voice in university decisions. This problem, coupled with the lack of seeking commuter student input into decisions, places the commuter student at a great disadvantage when trying to make significant changes which will

make their college experiences easier. Without a strong voice, commuters will do little to make their plights known and even less to encourage and persuade college officials to change the programs, policies, and practices to more completely fill their needs (Banning & Hughes, 1986).

Traditionally, college personnel have expected commuter students to adapt to the campus experience. Keeton & James (1992) emphasize that colleges must not put the entire burden of adjustment on the students. Colleges must do everything within their power to discontinue the practice of forcing students to abandon their traditions and ethical mores to fit into the campus setting. The negotiation and adoption of new college mores and goals which encompass others' values and ethical practices must be instituted. This should be accomplished without alienating the traditional majority or the new, diverse constituencies.

Myths About Commuter Students

Several myths have evolved among college personnel about commuter students. Many feel that commuter students are not as interested in their education as residential students. They feel that commuter students are less committed to achieving what is required to gain an education. This myth relates to the beliefs held by many college or university educators that commuters either do not want or need special attention or services. The aspirations of commuting students are poorly understood by educators. If educators do not have the opportunity or time to talk with commuter students, they do not gain insight into the many complexities of this group (Rhatigan, 1986).

Many educators view commuter students as less able academically than residential students. There is no evidence to support this assumption; however, there may be subgroups within the total commuter population who have particular

deficiencies which need to be addressed and dealt with in an effective way (Rhatigan, 1986). Likins (1991) states that many commuter students are viewed as being "tied to their mother's apron strings" and not capable of the usual academic loads that residential students undertake. Many educators also feel commuters are not capable of developing the maturity and autonomy that residential students achieve through the various educational experiences.

College personnel feel that commuting students have no interest in the campus beyond their classes. In reality, many of the college practices do not encourage attendance and participation by commuter students. Schedules are such that commuters often have to make separate, lengthy trips to attend activities or they are scheduled at times that interfere with work or family schedules (Rhatigan, 1986).

Another myth is that it is cheaper to educate part-time students than it is to educate full-time students. This has been very detrimental to the benefit of commuter colleges or universities and to commuter students. The way that most campuses calculate their economic bases is through the full-time equivalent (FTE). When figuring FTEs, funding agencies generally add up all of the undergraduate credit hours and divide by 15 or all of the graduate credit hours and divide by nine. The larger the commuter student population the greater is the discrepancy between the calculated FTE and the actual total enrollment. The more part-time students served, the greater the budgetary discrepancy between the workload based on FTE and the actual workload (Rhatigan, 1986). Commuter students often attend classes, leave, and then reenter again at a later time. This "stop-out phenomenon only serves to increase the discrepancy between the calculated and the actual loads.

Common Needs and Concerns of Commuter Students

Besides the transportation concerns already discussed, commuter students have many other needs. Due to the multiple life roles and the heavy responsibilities that commuter students face, they usually work outside their homes while attending school. Studies have demonstrated that commuter students worked more than residential students (Univ. of MD, College Park, ED 310 701). Since the majority of commuter students are women, they continue to be faced with the traditional roles of wife and mother. They are expected to manage households as well as care for other family members. Because many of these students are older, they may be faced with the responsibilities of caring for older relatives. For many of these students the decision to attend class or other university functions is weighed against work, child care, family, or adult parent responsibilities (Wilmes & Quade, 1986). Often choices of attending classes may be in conflict with very serious and needy family choices, e. g., taking a child or parent to see the doctor when illness is evident.

Time is a valuable asset for commuter students. These students need to learn how to schedule all of their many expected activities so that nothing vital is left out. When scheduling classes, these students will attempt to schedule them in as close of a time block as is possible. A long drive back and forth to class may require as much as two to four extra hours of time for each class attended. Often the drive back and forth to class is longer than the time spent in classes. Students who commute usually cannot drive more than once a week and still meet all of the other responsibilities facing them at home.

Commuter students frequently face another dilemma. When ill they may fear taking medications. Many drugs have side effects that interfere with safety when driving. Commuter students who are ill need to make choices regarding the use of medications which have potentially risky side effects or not taking the medications at

all and becoming more ill. Commuter students are often torn between missing classes and taking care of their health.

Support systems for commuter students are usually located off campus. Parents, siblings, spouses, children, employers, coworkers, and friends in the communities are all seen as supports to the commuting students. Many students feel a dissonance between their new worlds at the colleges and their former worlds at home. These strains are often very difficult to overcome. Educational institutions must provide opportunities for all of the students' various support systems to gain a better understanding of the college experience and to become more familiar with the students' new college world.

Due to the time crunch faced by commuter students, they have more difficulties establishing a sense of belonging to the college community. They often feel that the college sees them as extra students and not as significant as residential students. Commuter students often don't feel that they are wanted by the institution. They often feel that their curriculums are adapted to account for the decreased academic abilities that commuter students are believed to possess. Many college personnel assume that the amount of time that commuter students spend on the campus is proportional to the amount of time and involvement that the students want to devote to their educational experiences. In a study by Likins (1991) 65% of the 1,382 commuter students surveyed by telephone related that they desired to become more involved with the university community. Commuter students at most colleges and universities are not assisted to establish roots. Lockers and lounges are not provided for them, methods to establish faculty-student and student-student relationships are not built into the curriculum. Often when trying to talk with faculty during classes attended by all or mostly commuter students, it is very difficult to see the professor

during breaks due to all of the other students who want to also talk with the professor. Even talking with the professor about class related issues becomes almost impossible without an extra, outside of class contact.

What Should Institutions Do To Help the Commuter Students? Applying Some Theories

College and university personnel must assess and get to know who their students are. Miller (1986) states that the crucial first step in identifying and meeting the needs of commuter students is a demographic and needs assessment study. See appendix A for a list of questions that personnel should ask to learn about the student population.

While there are no theories which explain the diverse, complex issues facing commuter or adult students, one can apply several portions of the following theories to a greater understanding of what the commuter and adult students are facing when enrolled in higher education. Person-environment theories suggest that the context or situation that one is placed in determines significant variables to study and that individual behavior varies from one environment to another (Jacoby, 1989). Applying these theories, one could deduct that the behaviors of commuting students would be dependent upon the educational environment. If commuting students are respected and assisted to conquer hurdles associated with their traveling to and from school, their experiences will be much different from those commuting students attending institutions that do not appreciate or assist them to overcome their difficulties. If faculty do not try to understand the commuter students, the students may appear disinterested and apathetic towards their education. In reality, the student may be very interested but has to leave immediately to return home to other responsibilities. Faculty who show some interest in the commuter students may learn of their difficulties and realize

that their sincerity about attaining an education is just as strong or perhaps even stronger than many of the residential students.

Person-environment theories might also help to explain some of the difficulties that minority and high-risk commuter students are facing. If one assesses that many of the commuter students are first generation college students in the family, one would realize that the environments from which the students are coming will not be too conducive to help them understand what the college experience is about. It would be important for institutions with a large number of these high risk students to provide appropriate mentoring activities.

Psychological and developmental theories might help to explain the life stages of many of the students. Through assessing for the students' ages and applying Erikson's or other psychological and developmental theories to the student population, many of the students' present tasks and responsibilities can be realized. By learning that the majority of the students are 25 to 35 year old females, one would assume that many of the students would have major child care responsibilities in addition to the responsibilities of attending school. While students should not be allowed to pass courses without completing the required work, it does help tremendously when faculty demonstrate an understanding and empathy of what the student is experiencing. Minor adjustments and encouragement might make other tremendous differences in the commuter students' abilities to attend courses and complete them as expected.

Perhaps the theory of mattering and marginality is most directly related to the commuter students. Mattering as defined by Jacoby (1989) is the feeling that others depend upon us, are interested in us, and are concerned with our fate. This is very

important to commuter students. When students feel that they are not important to the institution, which is often the situation with commuter students in today's educational systems, the students will not feel the support that they need. By integrating the students' other worlds into the college campus activities, students can feel that they are significant and important to the institution. Marginality is the opposite of mattering. When students are treated as if they are not important or interesting, they will not feel the support that they need. Why would students; facing these attitudes, want to spend any more time on campus than what is required?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory could be applied to better understand the commuter students' difficulties in developing a sense of belonging to the campus. It is often very difficult for commuting students to be able to spend the time needed to develop peer and faculty relationships which Astin (1993) has shown to be very important. Often the basic physiologic and safety needs of the commuter students or their significant others takes priority over the need to educate oneself. Students who face such major responsibilities frequently during a course of study, have great hurdles to overcome just to stay with the program. These students would find it most difficult, if not impossible to feel a sense of belonging, when their lives are so stressed.

The theory of campus ecology suggests elements for an ecological analysis and provides the framework for designing and redesigning campuses through the "ecosystem design process." This process addresses the task of selecting what behaviors are valuable and, given the characteristics of the students, how the campus environment can be designed or redesigned to encourage the valued behavior. All of the environments influencing students' behaviors will be examined. Home, work, and community environments of commuter students will be considered as well as the campus environment. Students are intensely involved within this system. They are

viewed as the redesigners of the campuses. Values laden in campus designs are identified and challenged. New values more in congruence with students' values replace prior, self-serving values. Once values are changed policies, programs, and practices can also change.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) (1986) is the agency which determines guidelines and standards for colleges and universities. These standards and guidelines are used by student affairs professionals to establish and maintain quality treatment of students. This agency has published standards and guidelines which can be used in conjunction with the general standards and guidelines to guide the treatment of commuter students (Jacoby & Thomas, 1986). These documents are used widely by colleges and universities.

Measures which institutions should adopt to help commuter students include the following. Many of these are influenced by the CAS Standards and Guidelines for the Commuter Students.

1. Revise the mission to include statements that commit to the equality of all students including commuters.
2. Articulate or relate the college's commitment to the student as commuter to the faculty, staff, students, governing board, alumni, and the community.
3. Regularly collect comprehensive data about students and experiences with the college.
4. Regularly assess if the college programs, services, facilities, and resources address the needs of all students equitably.
5. Identify and rectify stereotypes or inaccurate assumptions of college

members towards commuter students and ensure that commuter students are treated as full members of the college.

6. Administrative decisions regarding resources, policies, and practices should consistently include the perspective of commuter students.
7. Quality practices should be consistent throughout the institution. What goes on in one department affects the others and students' perceptions of the educational experience as a whole.
8. Classroom experiences and interactions with faculty play major roles in determining the overall quality of commuter students' education.
9. Students should understand the interrelationship of curricular and cocurricular offerings. They should complement each other.
10. Campus units need to work together to implement change.
11. Technology should be used to its fullest to improve the institutions' ability to communicate with its students and to streamline the administrative processes.
12. Ensure that commuter students and the commuter institutions are treated fairly in federal, state, and local decision making, e. g., financial aid and institutional funding formulas.

Measures at UIUC

While the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) is predominantly a residential university there are measures that they practice that expedite the commuter students' education. Courses and whole programs are held off campus at other sites to shorten travel time and distance for commuters. Distance learning is being used to teach certain classes. Registration for extramural classes is held on-site

during the first class offering. Textbooks are brought to the first extramural class and distributed to students so they are not expected to travel to the Champaign-Urbana campus to purchase books. An 800, tollfree telephone number, is provided to students in extramural programs. Classes are scheduled once weekly, right after work so that students won't get home so late from class. Other classes may be scheduled on designated weekends.

These measures all help commuter students to attend classes at an off campus site. Students are invited to attend one of the class sessions at the main UIUC campus for one weekend during the semester. This visit to the main campus helps students develop a greater sense of belonging to the total U of I campus.

Measures at Other Institutions

Miller (1986) states that student services which enhance retention are just not coincidental. Chicago State University has implemented several measures which have significantly increased student retention (Cross, 1992). Chicago State is an urban, commuter university serving predominantly minority students who are first in their families to attend college. These students are usually older than the traditional college age freshmen students and are faced with many family and work responsibilities. Terenzini (1993) found that adaptation to college is much more difficult for first generation students and college creates a major disjunction in their lives and major breaks with their traditions. Needless to say, the students at Chicago State are faced with many hurdles.

The overall goal at Chicago State was to create a sense of family and nurturing. This was initiated by a faculty phonathon. Faculty became involved and contacted more than 2,500 potential students to answer questions and discuss concerns. This resulted in an 18% increase in enrollment in the fall of 1990.

Decentralized advising to the academic departments resulted in a closer student relationship with the faculty from their chosen departments. This also resulted in better monitoring of the students' progress. An Office of Academic Support was created to coordinate and monitor all academic support services. Students' progress was monitored at 6, 9, and 12 week intervals and students needing help were given immediate assistance. As a result of this measure the freshman mid-semester withdrawal rate dropped from 25% to 3%. According to Upcraft, Gardner, and Associates (1989) 30% of the entering freshmen students will not return to the same institution a year later. Of these 30% most students leave the university during the first six weeks of the first semester of the freshman year.

A special project was instituted in the summer of 1991. All of the prior years' freshmen students were called over the summer to learn of any problems that might prevent their return to school. The second year retention went from 55% in the fall of 1989 to >63% in the fall of 1991. Total enrollment figures increased 40% since the fall of 1989 which was the highest enrollment figure in the entire history of Chicago State. An attitude of "student obsessed" became the new rule. A tradition of "we" instead of "me" and "you" was established. The idea was adopted that no one person brings about success. Faculty, staff, students, families, and communities all play a part in retention and success.

New success rates were established for students of Chicago State University. Recognizing the reality of students' lives, administrators altered graduation expectations from anticipating most of them to graduate within four to five years to 75% of them graduating in seven years.

Chicago State tried other measures which made differences in success rates of

students. One of these included: a streamlined, shortened registration process. What once took several days now could be done in 15 minutes. A "welcome week" was held for students to meet deans, department chairs, faculty, and other students. Increased funding and grants for added resources was provided to develop and implement innovative, new processes to help students learn and succeed. Student and faculty worked together to prepare students from minority groups to pursue graduate studies. Other universities were consulted to provide for better preparation of students for later transfer. Finally, a Council of Community Volunteers was established to serve as tutors, mentors, speakers, and counselors for students.

Other methods, cited in the literature, to help the commuter students with the college experience included:

1. Expanded course offerings to evenings and weekends.
2. Expanded child care services to include evenings and weekends.
3. Satellite food and bookstore services.
4. Keep the library open until 2 AM during final exams to provide a better study environment for students who have difficulty studying at home.
5. Tuesday/Thursday college which consists of a special scheduling option designed to help the adult female students attend classes full time on two days a week from 9 AM to 4 PM (Flynn, 1986).
6. On-site programs for business and industry.
7. Identify one or two key staff members to become experts in the area of commuter students. These staff members would also act as advocates to the students (Miller, 1986). Likins (1986) states that student affairs professionals should become advocates for commuter students.
8. The facilities should be updated to provide adequate campus lighting,

parking, and study places for students. Commuter students should also become involved in redesigning the campuses.

9. A system of fee equity should be established. Commuter should have equal access to the use of fees as residential students. Events should be held at times that are more opportune for commuter students. Financial aid should be made available to part-time as well as full-time students. Commuting students should pay the same parking fees as residents; and, finally, commuters should be equally represented on committees.
10. Provide lockers and lounges for commuter students to use.

In summary, the situation facing commuter students in today's colleges and universities has been explored. Many college officials are not familiar with the needs and hardships that commuting students face when receiving an education. Often these students are viewed as being uninterested and apathetic. Hopefully, through more awareness by college administrators, staff, and faculty, commuting students will be better understood and asked to become involved in decisions which will affect their and future commuter students' college and university experiences.

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Appendix A

Questions an Institution Needs to Know about Commuter Students

What percentage of the student population are commuters?
How many students fall in the traditional age of 18 to 22? 22 to 25? 25 to 35? 35 to 45? 45 to 55? over 55?

What are the percentages of students by sex?
What are the ethnic backgrounds of the students?

How many attend full-time? part-time?
When are they on campus? day? evening? all day or only a few hours? weekends only?

What is the socioeconomic status of students and their families?
What is the level of education of their parents? other family members? peers?

How do students finance their education? parents? spouses?
Are they financially independent? Do they receive financial aid?

Are they employed? full-time? part-time? how many hours a week? on or off campus?

Family status? live with parents?
Marital status? children? other family responsibilities?

Where do students live? relatives? roommates? alone?
What type of housing? responsible for rent or mortgage payments?

How far do students live from campus? What are their modes of transportation?

Do students come from the local area? other parts of the state? from far away? from other countries?

Why do students choose this institution? What are their educational goals?

What are the relative academic abilities of commuter students?
Do they need significant remedial aid?